



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for

NSF 01-164, "George E. Brown, Jr. Network for Earthquake Engineering Simulation (NEES): Earthquake Engineering Research Equipment, Phase 2", Program Solicitation

Purpose

This FAQ seeks to be a helpful supplement to the NEES Phase 2 program solicitation. Refer to the online document on <http://www.eng.nsf.gov/nees/> for the latest version and additional information about the NEES program.

Official Guidelines

The National Science Foundation (NSF) official guidelines for submission of a proposal to the George E. Brown, Jr. Network for Earthquake Engineering Simulation (NEES): Earthquake Engineering Research Equipment, Phase 2 can be found on the Internet at <http://www.nsf.gov/cgi-bin/getpub?nsf01164>.

Deadlines

Letter of Intent Deadline: December 31, 2001

Proposal Deadline: January 30, 2002

Referenced Program Solicitations

These solicitations are provided for historical reference as their deadline dates have past:

- NSF 01-56: ["George E. Brown, Jr. Network for Earthquake Engineering Simulation \(NEES\): Consortium Development"](#).
- NSF 00-6: [Network for Earthquake Engineering Simulation \(NEES\): Earthquake Engineering Research Equipment](#).
- NSF 00-7: [Network for Earthquake Engineering Simulation \(NEES\): System Integration](#).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

The following is a list questions (Q) and answers (A) that are frequently asked of NEES officials. *The questions and answers listed in this document only apply to proposals submitted to the NSF 01-164, "George E. Brown, Jr. Network for Earthquake Engineering Simulation (NEES): Earthquake Engineering Research Equipment, Phase 2" Program Solicitation.*

Eligibility

Q: Can proposals include support for federal government employees as co-Principal Investigators or team members?

A: Federal government employees can be co-PIs or team members on proposals. However, according to the NSF Grant Policy Manual, NSF 95-26, Section 616.3: "Employees of the Federal Government (other than NSF) may be utilized as lecturers or staff members on a project and may receive compensation and/or expenses if they obtain prior approval from their agencies to participate, and if services to the project are performed outside their regular working hours or while they are on leave status from official duties."

Q: Can equipment vendors outside the U.S. be funded on proposals?

A: NSF does not have any policy against grantees purchasing foreign equipment. However, NSF does include the following in the Grant General Conditions (GC-1) dated 04/01, Article 38, Sense of the Congress on Use of Funds: "Recent Acts making appropriations to NSF provide 'It is the sense of the Congress that, to the greatest extent practicable, all equipment and products purchased with funds made available in this Act should be American-made' and require the Foundation to notify awardees of that statement."

Q: Can Principal Investigators and Co-Principal Investigators of NSF 00-6, NSF 00-7 and NSF 01-56 proposals and awards be Principal Investigators and co-Principal Investigators on proposals submitted to NSF 01-164?

A: Yes.

Q: Does the principal investigator have to be a full-time faculty member in the College of Engineering at the submitting institution?

A: Yes.

Q: Can eligibility be extended to universities in other countries who are represented in the U.S. by Section 501c(3) entities?

A: No. Only U.S. universities and colleges may submit proposals.

Q: Can international collaboration be funded?

A: Yes. Proposers wishing to include international collaborators should contact NEES Program Officers at nees@nsf.gov before proposal submission to discuss eligible project costs for such collaborations. However, the intent of program solicitation NSF 01-164 is to strengthen the capability of U.S. earthquake engineering researchers. Proposals that include international collaborators should justify why the collaborators are necessary and what unique and extraordinary expertise the collaborators provide that is not available in the United States.

Letters of Intent

Q: Who submits the mandatory letter of intent for a proposal?

A: As stated in the solicitation, under "Letters of Intent:" "The mandatory letters of intent must be submitted by authorized organizational representatives of U.S. universities and colleges on behalf of principal investigators via e-mail to nees@nsf.gov by December 31, 2001." The institution's authorized organizational representative, therefore, must submit the letter of intent.

Q: Can NSF release information about the mandatory letters of intent?

A: No. NSF treats mandatory letters of intent with the same confidentiality as a proposal submitted to NSF.

Q: Can co-principal investigators be added to proposals after submitting the letter of intent?

A: Yes. Additional staff may be added to the proposal at the time of proposal submission.

General Information

Q: Can links to World Wide Web sites of equipment and software vendors be put on the NSF NEES web site?

A: No. The NSF NEES website does not promote commercial organizations.

Q. Does NSF maintains a list of research relevant to NEES?

A. Yes, at <http://www.eng.nsf.gov/nees>

Q. How can I obtain a copy of proposals funded under NSF 00-6?

A. There are two ways to obtain copies of proposals awarded by NSF.

1) From NSF: Requests for proposals awarded by NSF are handled through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Below is the web site that describes the specific steps that must be followed to make a FOIA request to NSF for awarded proposals. Please read the section on this web site entitled "Making a FOIA Request."

<http://www.nsf.gov/home/pubinfo/foia.htm>

2) From the Principal Investigator of the awarded proposal: Alternatively, people often obtain copies of awarded proposals by making their own request directly to the Principal Investigator. Contact information about the Principal Investigator can be obtained from the award abstracts on the NSF home page <http://www.nsf.gov>, and then contact the Principal Investigator directly with your request.

Q: Are there NSF program solicitations related to information technology research and applications?

A: To keep current with NSF program solicitations, register yourself for the NSF Custom News Service on the NSF home page at <http://www.nsf.gov>. At the left tool bar of this home page, you will see "Custom News Service." Click on "Custom News Service" and follow the instructions to register yourself for this service. With this service, you can receive NSF program solicitations and other publications immediately as they are released electronically. Please see the following recent program solicitation that is related to information technology research and applications:

- NSF 01-149, Information Technology Research (ITR) at
- <http://www.nsf.gov/cgi-bin/getpub?01149>

Earthquake Engineering Research Equipment

Q: Can U.S. universities and colleges submit proposals to upgrade equipment that is located in a federal government laboratory? The principal investigators would be faculty members at a U.S. university or U.S. college, but the federal laboratory equipment would be upgraded and operated as a subaward in the proposal monitored under the direction of the faculty.

A: No. Any funded equipment must be located at the submitting "host" institution, with the following exception: for field installations, such as field experimentation and monitoring installations, the equipment may be located at an off-campus "host" site. Should the federal government desire to upgrade equipment located in a federal laboratory, funding could be provided directly to that laboratory in their appropriation from Congress. Alternatively, should NSF desire to provide funding to upgrade equipment in a federal laboratory, such funding could be provided directly as an interagency transfer rather than as a subaward.

Q: Is it appropriate for a proposal to include a usability engineering/human factor, component in support of remote research activities such as teleoperation?

A: Yes, this would be an acceptable component.

Q: Please provide guidance on the use of "teleoperation."

A: Proposers are to define how they will use teleobservation and teleoperation.

Q: Is the amount of funds available for awards likely to change in response to proposals submitted to this solicitation?

A: NSF established the number of anticipated awards and the total amount of funds available for award based upon the original Congressional authorization for the overall NEES Program, funds spent and committed to date, and to provide guidance to proposers on availability of funds. NSF is not rigidly bound to these estimates in the decision on NSF 01-164 awards; however, NSF expects the number of awards and the total amount awarded to be fairly close to the levels indicated.

Q: What is the difference between "site-specific local networking equipment" and "specialized equipment and software needed to facilitate teleobservation and teleoperation?"

A: "Site-specific local networking equipment" is defined in the Solicitation under Section II. Program Description, NSF Plan for Networking NEES Sites. Under Section IV. "Award Information," it states, "Specialized equipment and software needed to facilitate teleobservation and teleoperation" are eligible costs which support the additional dimensions of remote observation and/or operation. Equipment and software needed for teleobservation and teleoperation may include items unique to the proposed earthquake engineering research equipment and items that are a subset of the site-specific local networking equipment.

Q: Can proposals include budget items for host site data base collection and management and new visualization tools?

A: According to the Solicitation under the section "Eligible Project Costs," data acquisition systems are eligible project costs. The data acquisition system may include the capability to acquire and store experimental data. Visualization tools that are required as a part of the actual operating/control/data acquisition system for the NEES equipment for onsite operation, teleobservation, and teleoperation are eligible project costs. However, visualization tools for pre-experiment simulations or tools for the visualization of derived experimental data for research and analysis purposes are not eligible project costs.

Q: Can the equipment be used before September 30, 2004, if the equipment is operational before that date?

A: Yes. Simply follow the Section V. Proposal Preparation and Submission Instructions, sub-Section H. Equipment Management and Operation, of the Solicitation and "include a schedule for operation of the equipment through September 30, 2004."

Q: Our institution plans to submit two proposals to NSF 01-164 for distinctly different earthquake engineering research equipment. However, some of the equipment listed in the two proposals could be shared among the two equipment facilities proposed and, therefore, lead to reduced costs to NSF. Should these proposals be combined?

A: As required in the Solicitation, submit two separate "stand alone" proposals that can be reviewed on their own merit. If both proposals are funded, NSF will work with the institution to take advantage of such synergy when making these awards.

Q: Are competitive bids required in selecting suppliers or subcontractors for the equipment?

A: As stated in the Solicitation under Section V. Proposal Preparation and Submission Instructions, A.3.L. Procurement Approach, Including Performance-Based Payment Schedule Strategy, proposers are to "indicate whether the quotation(s), which must support the equipment cost estimates, is the result of competitive bidding or a single bid, and the expiration date of the quote(s). Describe the strategy to obtain new quotation(s) or re-validation of existing quotation(s) for procurement purposes should an award be made." Further, as stated in Appendix 4, "institutional procurement policies should be pursued as far as feasible before submission of the proposal so that the request can be considered on current and realistic information." NSF 01-164, Appendix 1, asks proposers to explain why "a specific manufacturer and model has been selected." Therefore, proposers should follow their institution's procurement policy in preparing a proposal.

Q: Can target performance specifications, rather than absolute performance specifications, be proposed for the equipment design?

A: As stated in the Solicitation under Section V. Proposal Preparation and Submission Instructions, Appendix 1, proposals should "include a detailed listing of the design criteria and performance specifications of the equipment." Any targeted, rather than absolute, performance specification should be listed as a risk in the proposal and discussed as such in the proposal under the section "Risk Identification and Mitigation" (see Solicitation Section V. Proposal Preparation and Submission Instructions, A.3.K. Risk Identification and Mitigation).

Q: Who provides the on-campus connection between the NEES equipment installation and the high performance network?

A: The host institution is responsible for the on-campus connectivity—for example, fiber optic cable—between the NEES equipment installation and the high-performance network.

Q: Are costs for the design and construction of a control room to house all the control, data acquisition, teleobservation, and teleoperation equipment eligible project costs?

A: No.

Q: What is the expectation for shared-use access of equipment?

A: As stated in the Solicitation under Section V. Proposal Preparation and Submission Instructions, A.3.F. Project Management Plan, the NEES awardee is to have a management and organization structure that cooperates with the NEES Consortium Development awardee. NEES equipment awardees cooperate in NSF-planned activities to help develop the NEES Consortium. The Consortium establishes shared-use access policies, including training and shared-use time for researchers outside the host institution, on the NEES equipment. Shared-use access policies will be developed together by the NEES equipment awardees, the NEES Consortium and the NEES System Integrator awardee. As stated in the Solicitation under Section V. Proposal Preparation and Submission Instructions, A.3.N. Education, Training, and Shared Use, proposers are to "estimate the annual percentage of time, through September 30, 2014, that the equipment will be scheduled for: research by host institution investigators, shared-use access by researchers outside the host institution, training on equipment usage, and routine maintenance." If user fees are involved for shared-use access through September 30, 2004, proposers are asked to describe how the fees will be established. From October 1, 2004 through September 30, 2014, user fees will be established by the NEES equipment awardees and the NEES Consortium.

Q: Are reaction walls themselves, the strengthening of reaction walls, and modifications to a strong floor as a part of the reaction wall system eligible project costs?

A: Yes. New or modified reaction walls and strong floors as a part of the reaction wall system are eligible project costs.

Q: Can the requested equipment be located on government property?

A: Equipment awarded, such as field installations, may be permanently located on local, state, or federal government property; however, the host institution (that is, U.S. university or college) retains ownership of the equipment. The title to equipment purchased or fabricated by a U.S. university or college with NSF grant funds vests in the awardee upon acquisition.

Connectivity to a High Performance Network

Q: My institution does not provide access to a high performance network. Will NSF fund my institution's access to a high performance network?

A: No. According to the Solicitation under "Award Information," costs *not* allowable under this solicitation include "Connectivity for the host institution or host site for access to a high performance network." The host institution is responsible for providing and maintaining access to a high performance network through September 30, 2014.

Q: My institution has access at the host equipment site to a high performance network, but the connectivity needs to be upgraded. Will NSF provide funding for needed upgrades, for example, to get a higher-capacity connection to a high performance network?

A: No, the host institution is responsible for the on-campus connectivity between the NEES equipment installation and the high-performance network.

Merit Review and Program Information

Q: When will the Equipment Portfolio Review Panel be held at NSF?

A: At this time, NSF anticipates the panel being held in May, 2002; however, no specific date has been finalized. As stated in the Solicitation, under Section III. Eligibility Information, Principal Investigators are required to brief the Equipment Portfolio Review Panel in person at NSF headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. Proposers who are to participate in the briefings before the Equipment Portfolio Review Panel will be advised as such in April-May, 2002, and given a specific date and time window for the briefing to take place. Principal Investigators should plan their schedules during this period to be available for this part of the proposal merit review process. Alternate panel dates or briefings will not be scheduled if proposers cannot make the panel date. Travel and other costs will be the responsibility of proposers.

Q: How many members of the proposing team can participate in the briefing to the Equipment Portfolio Review Panel?

A: Proposing team members participating in the briefing will be limited to the Principal Investigator and one co-Principal Investigator.

Q: How can I volunteer to be a reviewer of proposals for this Solicitation?

A: Send an email and brief biographical sketch expressing your interest to nees@nsf.gov. Doing so does not guarantee that you will be chosen as a panelist.

Miscellaneous

Q: How can I find out about NSF programs related to this Solicitation?

A: To keep current with NSF program solicitations, register yourself for the NSF Custom News Service on the NSF home page at <http://www.nsf.gov>. At the left tool bar of this home page, you will see "Custom News Service." Click on "Custom News Service" and follow the instructions to register yourself for this service. With this service, you can receive NSF program solicitations and other publications immediately as they are released electronically. The NSF home page also has a search engine.

Q: Where can I find more information about NEES awards?

A: Information about the NEES program, including awarded projects funded under NEES program solicitations, may be found on the NSF NEES web site at <http://www.eng.nsf.gov/nees>.

Q: Who will fund the operation of the earthquake engineering research equipment from October 1, 2004 to September 30, 2014?

A: Proposals must include in Appendix 4, the "estimated annual total costs for operation of the equipment from the date that the equipment is expected to become operational through September 30, 2014." NSF envisions that operation and maintenance of the NEES equipment will be provided through the NSF Research and Related Activities account in the Division of Civil and Mechanical Systems for the duration of the NEES project from October 1, 2004 through September 30, 2014. User fees will be cooperatively determined by the NEES Consortium and the equipment awardees, based upon site experimentation usage under the NEES Program and operating costs to be paid by NSF through the Consortium award. The expense of maintenance and operation of the NEES equipment, as shared-use equipment, will be coordinated through the NEES Consortium during FY 2005 – FY 2014.

Q: What is the boundary between equipment provided under NSF 00-7, "NEES: System Integration," and NSF 01-164, "George E. Brown, Jr. Network for Earthquake Engineering Simulation (NEES): Earthquake Engineering Research Equipment, Phase 2?"

A: The boundary will generally be the demarcation point between the host institution's internal network(s) and the external high performance (wide area) network(s) to which it connects. Eligible equipment needed internal to the demarcation point would be funded as supplements under NSF 01-164 as site-specific local networking equipment. Eligible equipment external to the demarcation point, if any, would be funded under NSF 00-7.

Q: What is the expectation on data sharing if the NEES equipment is used for experimentation by NSF-funded research, research by another federal agency, or research by private industry? Will data from past experimentation -for example, that has been collected over the past 20-30 years- be included in the NEES data base repository?

A: Proposers should refer to the Solicitation under Section VII. Award Administration Information, C. Reporting Requirements, *NEES Data Requirements*, for NEES policy and requirement information. NSF expects that other federal and state agencies and private industry may want to take advantage of the unique capabilities provided by the NEES equipment and that they will pay user fees for such access. NSF envisions that data derived from any privately funded proprietary experiments would remain proprietary.

Q: Can private consultants be included in the budget request?

A: Yes. See NSF 01-2, Grant Proposal Guide, Chapter II, Section C.6.f (iii), and "Consultant Services," for information on budgeting for consultant services. The current maximum consultant daily rate is available at <http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/cpo/policy/ques.htm>